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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 06 ADDIS ABABA 003430

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FOR SECRETARY RICE FROM AMBASSADOR YAMAMOTO

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [MARR](#) [ET](#) [SO](#) [ER](#)  
SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: SCENESETTER FOR SECRETARY RICE'S  
DECEMBER 5 VISIT

Classified By: Ambassador Donald Yamamoto for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

SUMMARY

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¶1. (S) Your visit to Ethiopia comes at a time when Ethiopia faces security concerns from extremists based in Somalia, saber-rattling by Eritrea over the border demarcation impasse, and an increase in domestic insurgent activity. Ethiopia's excessive response to Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) insurgents in the underdeveloped and historically marginalized Ethiopia Somali region has placed the region in crisis with 800,000 of the 4 million population food insecure, drawing negative press reports, particularly from U.S. journalists. The historic 2005 national elections were praised for its transparent openness was followed by mass arrests and limits on political openness. The release of the 71 major political detainees earlier this summer brought calm and renewed hope for political dialogue. But problems in the Ogaden have been followed by political differences between the ruling and opposition parties. Heading into local elections next spring, opposition parties complain of restrictions on access to their constituencies, harassment and detention of party supporters and potential candidates. Ethiopia seeks World Trade Organization (WTO) membership, facing severe economic challenges, poverty, and advancing reform in key sectors such as banking and telecommunications, which acts as a break on the country's economic growth potential.

¶2. (S) Ethiopia is a strong and strategic partner of the United States and the Prime Minister and his core advisors have been dependable and reliable supporters. The ruling party has made significant advances in democratic reforms and economic openings -- within the parameters of its "revolutionary democracy" vision and retaining strong control over how reforms are carried out -- since coming to power in ¶1991. In light of the special relationship and influence that the United States enjoys with Ethiopia, and our strong military and intelligence-sharing relationship, we are uniquely positioned to influence Ethiopia's leaders to advance economic and political reforms to build strong national institutions of governance, to sustain recent economic advances, to maintain national security and stability while respecting human rights and civil liberties, and to address the problems in the Ogaden in a more humane and inclusive manner. Due to the influence of hard-liners within the ruling party's central committee, most of whom do not support the U.S., Prime Minister Meles faces obstacles in

moving the country in the right direction. He has slowly replaced the aging guards with more dynamic forward looking new leaders like the ministers of health and trade. As evidence from firm persuasion from the U.S. Embassy, we are seeing positive developments in the Ogaden from more feeding sites and distribution of food to the region. It is clear that only the U.S. has the cache and is willing to use its position with the Prime Minister to work with him privately and persuasively to move the country in a more rapid direction on human rights, opening political space for the opposition, and liberalizing key economic sectors. End Summary.

#### THE OGADEN

¶3. (C) The ONLF is an ethnic-Ogadeni Somali nationalist insurgent movement which has taken up arms against the Ethiopian Government (GoE), with the goal of reversing the perceived historical marginalization of the Ogadeni people. There has been an up-tick in ONLF attacks since early 2006. Following an April 23, 2007 ONLF attack on a Chinese oil exploration field in Abole, the government began an aggressive counter-insurgency campaign that has included search and destroy missions against rebel targets, denying food to, and the forced displacement of, civilians perceived to be sympathetic to the rebels, and the forced conscription of civil servants to fight against the insurgents.

¶4. (C) Humanitarian conditions in the Ogaden have reached crisis levels because of the ongoing GoE military operations, rebel activity, GoE interference with food distribution, and GoE restrictions on commercial traffic. UN and U.S. Mission

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assessment teams have investigated food, water, and health needs of the local population and monitored the dispatch and distribution of emergency food aid to targeted areas in the past two months with the following findings:

--Pre-famine indicators have begun to emerge, including lack of food in markets, reduced household food intake, consumption of wild foods, and the excessive slaughter of livestock.

--The government is restricting much of the commercial traffic into the region (which usually supplies 80% of the region's food). The few trucks that do get through are far too limited to meet food needs for the area's 1.5 million residents.

--The UN reports that while human rights abuses including rape, forced displacement, and murder, these allegations have yet to be independently confirmed, public testimonials suggest systemic abuses likely by both sides.

¶5. (C) The GoE has recently permitted the UN to open two new offices in Degahabur and Kebri Dehar to coordinate a humanitarian response and has promised to restart food aid shipments in the conflict areas. Additionally, it has given permission for 19 NGOs to begin operations in the region. However, to date the food aid shipments have yet to reach distribution centers and the NGOs have been asked to submit names of local staff members before that will can begin operations. The International Committee of the Red Cross and Medecins Sans Frontieres, both earlier expelled from the region, have not been given permission to reenter. The U.S. Embassy has consistently taken the lead within the donor and international community in monitoring developments, declaring the crisis that exists in the region, and coordinating the strong and unified international response that has driven the limited, yet important, opening that have been achieved in addressing the crisis. In response to the situation, the U.S. Government has taken the following actions:

--The U.S. Embassy has hosted monthly meetings of NGOs,

donors, and UN agencies to monitor developments and coordinate the international community's response.

--On 17 August the USG issued a disaster declaration releasing additional funds to meet humanitarian needs.

--The USG is providing \$18.7 million dollars in humanitarian assistance for the region, including \$3.7 million in health and nutrition assistance and \$15 million in food assistance.

--The U.S. Embassy is pressing the GoE to take necessary steps to facilitate commercial and humanitarian food and medical deliveries to improve conditions.

--Countrywide this year the US has provided more than \$200 million dollars to support humanitarian programs including the delivery of food aid, strengthening disaster preparedness, and implementing emergency nutrition, health, and water programs.

¶6. (S) While the actions detailed above have secured GoE concessions aimed to mitigate the impacts of the insurgency and counter-insurgency on the civilian population, the diplomatic community in Ethiopia is convinced that 1) greater pressure on the GoE is necessary to address the humanitarian crisis, and 2) a long-term, sustainable resolution to the underlying issues driving the current situation requires dialogue and political accommodation between the GoE and the Ogadeni community -- including the ONLF. While the GoE continues to view the ONLF as a terrorist organization, their standard modus operandi does not include targeting of civilians and the United States views them as a domestic insurgency, not a terrorist organization. Although the GoE insists that Eritrea is arming and supporting the ONLF, Post has received no credible evidence of such support from non-GoE-derived sources.

#### THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

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¶7. (SBU) The May 2005 elections and their aftermath continue

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to weigh heavily in Ethiopia's domestic political scene. The campaign period running up to these elections was the most free and fair in Ethiopia's history with unfettered campaigning, equitable media coverage, and live televised debates. Despite government intervention in the vote counting phase, the international community assesses that the majority of the results were generally credible, with the opposition receiving significantly more popular support in the election than ever before: winning control of the Addis Ababa city administration, as well over 170 seats in the 547-seat parliament, up from 12 seats previously. Opposition allegations of electoral fraud and the boycott of parliament by leaders of the largest opposition group, the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) eventually led to an organized civil disobedience campaign which turned violent when confronted by security forces. Security forces killed nearly 200 protesters, detained over 30,000 suspected demonstrators incommunicado for over ten weeks, and arrested most of the CUD leadership, as well as several journalists, and civil society leaders, charging them with capital crimes, ranging from treason and genocide to "outrages against the Constitution." Their 18-month trials ended in July and August with guilty verdicts for most of the defendants. The government subsequently pardoned all convicted after intervention by Ethiopian elders to promote reconciliation. Following their release, many of the CUD leaders toured the U.S. and Europe to rally diaspora support and to raise money. Now back in Ethiopia, it remains to be seen what place they still have in Ethiopian politics.

¶8. (SBU) In the shadow of this trial, the U.S. and other donors continued to facilitate an ongoing process of political dialogue between the ruling party and opposition

leaders from various parties who have taken their seats in Parliament. Party representatives, supported by donor-funded comparative studies of practices in other democracies, have revised Parliamentary rules of procedure to better reflect international standards and to accommodate a multi-party political environment. The dialogue also reached agreement on many aspects of the reorganization of the National Electoral Board (NEB). The leaders of most of the opposition groups walked out of the talks before ratification of their conclusions due to the ruling party's refusal to consider their proposals. Key issues of a revised press law and political party financing remain on the agenda, but the ruling party is demanding a formal apology from the opposition leaders for walking out before resuming dialogue.

¶9. (C) The next major milestone in Ethiopia's democratization process will be local-level elections, currently anticipated to be conducted in Spring 2008. Though originally scheduled to be held in December 2005, they were repeatedly postponed due to political turmoil and lack of preparation by both the NEB and political parties. Opposition politicians complain that they remain restricted from visiting constituencies, cannot freely meet with supporters, their offices remain closed by security forces, and receive limited access to government-run mass media. Many have privately talked of boycotting the elections unless these conditions change. The U.S. Embassy, together with other donors, remains engaged with the NEB to develop and support an extensive reform program and to help build the NEB's capacity to administer elections, train NGOs involved in voter education and election observation, and enhance the professionalism of board members. Further, we remain engaged with both the opposition and the GoE to address the issues that may threaten to compromise a free and fair election.

#### SOMALIA -----

¶10. (C) The late October resignation of Transitional Federal Government (TFG) Prime Minister Gedi averted further damaging hostilities between his backers and those of TFG President Yusuf, but significant challenges remain to be overcome before the TFG process can produce a stable and effective Somali government. Nur (Adde) Hassan Hussein, a former Attorney General and head of ICRC in Somalia, was sworn in as the new TFG Prime Minister on November 24. Yusuf and Nur Adde must now take advantage of the end of senior political infighting to begin focusing the TFG on governing and the provision of services if it is to retain any credibility and

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gain greater domestic legitimacy among Somali clans. The Ethiopian Government has made it clear that it is no longer willing to let the TFG flounder and is increasingly inclined to provide explicit political guidance to the TFG to establish conditions necessary to allow Ethiopian troops to withdraw from Mogadishu.

¶11. (C) The August 2007 National Reconciliation Conference (NRC) held in Mogadishu closed as planned by passing resolutions relating to clan reconciliation, distribution of resources, broader representation within the TFG, and a timetable for implementation, reaffirming the requirement for elections in 2009 among other issues. The NRC was attended by more than 3,000 delegates, but key groups including former Council of Islamic Courts (CIC) elements and supporters, as well as two Hawiye sub clans, refused to participate limiting the inclusiveness of the conference. The TFG is now charged with overseeing implementation of the forward political process and continuing the reconciliation process. The TFG, since the NRC, has made little progress because of the intense political infighting between Yusuf and Gedi, but the appointment of Nur Adde presents a new opportunity.

¶12. (C) The TFG is opposed militarily by a coalition of anti-Ethiopian Somali factions and remnants of the former

CIC. In September, Eritrea hosted a rival conference to the NRC where more than 300 delegates were in attendance including former CIC officials Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys and Sheikh Sharif Ahmed. The attendees were united only in their opposition to the TFG and the Ethiopian military presence in Somalia and few observers expect anything substantive to come from this coalition other than continued insurgent attacks against the TFG and the Ethiopian military.

¶13. (C) The Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) and TFG forces have been unable to decisively defeat the CIC insurgents since Ethiopia entered Somalia in December 2006; attacks occur in Mogadishu almost daily. The TFG controls little in Somalia outside of Mogadishu and Baidoa except for a few areas along major lines of communication where ENDF forces are present. The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) consists of only 1,600 Ugandan forces that rely on the ENDF for security. Burundi, Ghana, and Nigeria have promised to contribute troops, but as of yet there is no realistic timetable for their arrival. Eritrea continues to provide support to CIC remnants inside Somalia.

¶14. (C) On the humanitarian front, because of the continuing insecurity in Mogadishu, more people continue to leave the city than return. An estimated 88,000 people fled in late October 2007 bringing the number of people who have left the capital this year to more than 450,000 and increasing the total number of displaced persons in Somalia to more than 800,000. The majority of these people are now concentrated in south-central regions where clan tension and conflict are making the provision of humanitarian aid difficult. The GoE refuses to recognize Somali refugees in Ethiopia arguing that conditions within Somalia do not pose a safety threat to civilians to justify the flight of refugees. Since the end of August USAID/OFDA has provided an additional \$6.1 million in humanitarian assistance bringing the total assistance provided this fiscal year to \$24.5 million benefiting more than 2 million people in the country.

#### ETHIOPIA-ERITREA

¶15. (SBU) Ethiopia and Eritrea remain locked in a political and military standoff over implementation of the 2002 Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC) decision awarding contested territory, including transfer of the Ethiopian controlled village of Badme, to Eritrea. Asmara insists that Addis Ababa allow the physical demarcation of the border as a precondition for normalized relations and Addis Ababa insists on dialogue regarding underlying factors contributing to the conflict before the border can be demarcated. In recent months, the tension between the two capitals has been increasing because of the EEBC's plans to proceed with de facto demarcation by geographic coordinates on November 30, 2007, rather than by placing pillars on the ground as originally envisioned when the EEBC was established. Both parties oppose the &virtual demarcation.8 Ethiopia has

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raised the possibility that it would withdraw from the Algiers Agreement (the cease-fire that ended the 1998-2000 war and created the EEBC) and seek other legal means to deal with Eritrea.

¶16. (S//NF) Militarily, Ethiopian leaders are concerned that Eritrea will attack Ethiopia after the November 30 deadline to claim land awarded to them by the EEBC's border delimitation decision. Eritrean leaders fear that Ethiopia will attack prior to the end of November to prevent the demarcation by coordinates from occurring. While neither military appears poised to attack the other, both armies have been reinforcing their positions along the border giving either the capability to attack with little warning. The Ethiopian and Eritrean militaries were separated by a 25-kilometer wide demilitarized Temporary Security Zone (TSZ) -- which exists almost entirely inside Eritrea -- patrolled



by the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) until October 2006 when Eritrea began moving in small numbers of troops, armor, and artillery. Since August 2007, Eritrea has been moving in additional forces effectively eliminating the TSZ as a buffer. In response to Eritrea's militarization of the border, the Ethiopian military has moved additional infantry, armor, and artillery to the border area since mid-October. Ethiopia may have as many as 80,000 troops within 100-kilometers of the border whereas Eritrea, by nature of its small geographic size, may have more than 200,000 troops within a day's travel of the border.

¶17. (S//NF) Tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea are also exacerbated by Asmara's continued support for multiple anti-Ethiopian insurgent groups in Ethiopia -- including the ONLF and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) -- in addition to the provision of support for al-Shabaab remnants of the CIC fighting against Ethiopian military forces deployed in Somalia, and other extremist groups seeking to conduct terrorist attacks against Ethiopian, and possibly U.S., interests inside Ethiopia.

#### SUDAN

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¶18. (C) Despite its strong and historical links with both the National Congress Party (NCP) and the Southern People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), the GoE has not played a strong, overt mediating role in Sudan. In light of the Eritrean Government's active interventions in talks with Sudan's Eastern Front and Darfur rebel groups, as well as continued ties with SPLM leaders, an overt Ethiopian roll could risk morphing Eritrea's response to yet another proxy front from which to undermine Ethiopia. The United States could utilize the GoE to convey messages to the NCP and to gain insights into NCP thinking on developments -- in light of Meles' near-daily telcons with President Bashir -- but a more overt Ethiopian role in mediating, particularly on North-South issues, is unlikely.

#### NORTH KOREA

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¶19. (S//NF) Despite press reports from April alleging U.S. consent for an Ethiopian arms purchase from North Korea (DPRK), Post continues to press Ethiopia to end its arms sourcing relationship with DPRK. Ethiopia has maintained a relationship with DPRK since at least the mid-1980s. Its border dispute with Eritrea and military operations in Somalia are driving defense acquisitions and may create demand for North Korean arms imports. Ethiopia relies on DPRK for inexpensive ammunition components, spare parts, and production machinery to develop its indigenous arms production capability of ammunition and small arms and keep its aging stock of Soviet era weapons operable. DPRK also built, and helps operate, two munitions production facilities in Ethiopia.

¶20. (S//NF) Shortly after UNSCR 1718 banned arms transfers from DPRK in late 2006, the GoE informed our Embassy of an imminent delivery of tank parts and munitions components. The GoE claims that the parts it received do not violate the embargo because they burned up in transit before being received. The extent to which Ethiopian officials are aware of North Korean efforts to use a Chinese company as a cut out

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to hide the true origin of future shipments is unclear.

¶21. (S//NF) In response to U.S. demarches, the GoE has stated that it supports U.S. policy on DPRK and is attempting to phase out DPRK as an arms source and local production partner. Embassy Addis continues to solicit additional information on precisely what items are being imported from DPRK and produced in DPRK-operated local factories. We will also press Ethiopia to identify a timeline for weaning itself

from this relationship. Depending on the GoE's willingness for transparency with us, we may be able to help them identify alternate sources of arms from Eastern Europe and elsewhere. Ethiopia's decision on sourcing replacements for the DPRK parts damaged by a ship fire will provide a strong indicator of Ethiopia's commitment to ending this relationship.

#### H.R. 2003 - THE ETHIOPIA DEMOCRACY AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

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¶22. (C) The GoE has vehemently opposed Congressman Payne's H.R. 2003 "The Ethiopia Democracy and Accountability Act" since long before it unanimously passed the House on October 2, 2007. While the sentiment and concerns driving the bill -- rampant human rights abuses, the precipitous closure of political space following the May 2005 elections, and persistent impediments to opposition political activities -- are all valid, the chastising tone and threats of withholding foreign assistance are not productive ways to affect positive change or to engage a strong partner. From the GoE perspective, the bill represents a possible indication of a change in the tone of our bilateral relationship since the Democrats took control over Congress and as a potential harbinger of the change in bilateral relations to come should a democratic Administration come to power in 2009. In recent months, the GoE has raised H.R. 2003 with Post as an explanation for the inability to secure ratification of our Article 98 Agreement within their own parliament and as a possible influencing factor in their deliberations on whether to accredit new VOA stringers.

¶23. (SBU) From Post and the Administration's perspective, the House-passed bill unconstitutionally infringes on the Executive's authority to conduct foreign policy. The foreign assistance directives strip Post of the flexibility to redirect funding to quickly address emergent issues which we can influence. The limitation on security assistance would preclude us from continuing the current military training programs which cover issues such as the respect for human rights and civil-military relations, all of which would help advance the professed objectives of the bill. The GoE has made clear, and Post is convinced, that the enactment of this bill into law would cause additional casualties in our bilateral relationship, undermine our influence with the GoE, and impede achievement of some of our primary objectives in the Horn of Africa.

YAMAMOTO